



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913
PH (517) 373.3447 | FAX (517) 373.5849
www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/birkholz/

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Contact: Amanda Price
517-373-3447

Sen. Birkholz urges governor, DEQ to keep commitments to protecting Michigan's water resources

LANSING – Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, today called on the governor and the state Department of Environmental Quality to keep their commitment to protecting Michigan's water resources through the already established Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council.

The governor signed Senate Bill 289, now Public Act 148 of 2003, which created the council. The governor also signed HB 4087, now Public Act 177, to establish proven groundwater regulation modeled after Indiana's successful program.

Unfortunately, the DEQ is now setting up a separate workgroup to deal with water issues before the Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council has had sufficient time to complete its work.

"If you keep changing how the work will get done, then the work will never get done," said Birkholz, chairperson of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee.

"When we crafted the legislation last year we assembled all the key interest groups to help determine the appropriate actions necessary to protect our water resources – and they agreed the council was the way to go."

The Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council – made up of diverse experts – is tasked with studying water availability in Michigan.

"It is impossible to create worthwhile water-protection regulations when we don't have all the facts," Birkholz said. "The council's work will allow us to get a firm grasp on what exactly is occurring in Michigan's aquifers. DEQ Director Steve Chester's actions to create a separate workgroup are diverting resources away from this invaluable effort."

Michigan also is engaged in a multi-state effort to address Great Lakes water diversion through the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

"We believe the DEQ should also respect that process and remain committed to working with other states on these important issues," Birkholz said. "The interest groups that dedicated time and energy to the current process deserve to know that their governor will stand by her commitments."

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